31 March 1954

This talk is based upon Mother’s essay “The Four Austerities and the Four Liberations”, Part I.

“...the vital has three sources of subsistence. The one most easily accessible to it comes from below, from the physical energies through the sensations.

“The second is on its own plane, when it is sufficiently vast and receptive, by contact with the universal vital forces.

“The third, to which it usually opens only in a great aspiration for progress, comes to it from above by the infusion and absorption of spiritual forces and inspiration.”

Sweet Mother, here I have not understood. You have said: “... a great aspiration for progress comes to it from above by the infusion and absorption of spiritual forces and inspiration.”

What haven’t you understood?

The meaning, Sweet Mother.

You are breaking up the sentence wrongly. (Mother looks at the text.)

There are three sources, you know. The third source is usually closed to people; it comes to them only in moments of great aspiration. When they have a very great aspiration and rise towards higher forces, at that time the vital can receive these higher forces into itself; and then this becomes a source of considerable energy for it. But in its ordinary, habitual life it is not in contact with these forces—unless, of course, it is
Questions and Answers

transformed; but I am speaking of the ordinary vital in ordinary life. It is not open to this source of higher forces, and for it this is even altogether non-existent. In the immense majority of people all their vital force comes to them from below, from the earth, from food, from all the sensations. From food... they draw vital energy out of food, and they... it is by seeing, hearing, touching, feeling that they contact the energies contained in matter. They draw them in this way. This is their customary food.

Now, some people have a very developed vital which they have subjected to a discipline — and they have a sense of immensity and are in contact with the world and the movements of world-forces. And so they can receive... if they aspire and call... they can receive the universal vital forces which enter them and renew the amount of energy they need.

There are others, very rare ones — or maybe in very rare moments of their individual life — who have an aspiration for the higher consciousness, higher force, higher knowledge, and who, by this call, draw to themselves the forces of higher domains. Then this also renews in them very special energies, of a special value.

But unless one is practising yoga, a regular discipline, usually one does not often contact this source; one draws from the same level or from below.

You have said: “Sensations are an excellent instrument for knowledge and education.” How?

How? But it is through sensations that you learn: by seeing, observing, hearing. Classes develop your sensations, studies develop your sensations, the mind receives things through sensations. By the education of the senses the growth of one’s general education is aided; if you learn to see well, exactly, precisely; if you learn to hear well; if you learn through touch to know the nature of things; if you learn through the sense of smell to distinguish between different odours — all these are a powerful
means of education. In fact, they should be used for this, as instruments of observation, control and knowledge. If one is sufficiently developed, one can know the nature of things through sight; through the sense of smell one may also know the value, the different nature of things; by touch one can recognise things. It is a question of education; that is, one must work for it.

For example, there is a considerable difference between the vision of ordinary people and that of artists. Their way of seeing things is much more conscious and complete than that of ordinary people. When one has not trained one’s vision, one sees vaguely, imprecisely, and has impressions rather than an exact vision. An artist, when he sees something and has learnt to use his eyes — for instance, when he sees a figure, instead of seeing just a form, like that, you know, a form, the general effect of a form, of which he can vaguely say that this person resembles or doesn’t much resemble what he sees — sees the exact structure of the figure, the proportions of the different parts, whether the figure is harmonious or not, and why; and also of what kind or type or form it is; all sorts of things at one glance, you understand, in a single vision, as one sees the relations between different forms.

When you have trained your eyes to see things with exactness, you can do so; it is an exercise you can quite easily do. For example, you have to put something, an object or a number of things, into a box. An ordinary person will need to take the tape-measure and measure the box to find out precisely what is needed. The man who has trained his eyes will see the things which are to be put in and at a glance will see which box is required; or perhaps, if there is a liquid to be poured, he will know the exact size of the bottle, because his eye is used to measuring things and he can, by seeing the thing, know its exact size. For instance, see another example: you have to put a ring on someone’s finger. Ordinary people are obliged to take the rings and try them on one after another till they find one of the right size. He who has trained his eyes looks at the finger and
then at the rings; he won’t be deceived and will immediately pick up the ring which fits exactly, without making a mistake. Well, this kind of training for the eyes can also be given to hearing, in order to distinguish sounds and all the qualities of sound. It can be given to the sense of smell, to distinguish odours and the different qualities of odours; for taste, the same thing.

And if you approach things with this idea — of studying, of wanting to develop exactitude of perception and the relation between things — then, instead of living in sensations for sensations’ sake (that is, “Oh, this is pleasant” or “this is unpleasant”, “I like this, I don’t like that” and all this kind of foolishness), you know the quality of things, their use and their interrelations through this study of the senses. This puts you in contact with the world in a completely conscious way. For everything, the least detail...

For example, you are obliged to cook and want to prepare a good dish. Well, if you have not trained your senses you will have to try out a little of this and a little of that and then taste it and again correct, arrange. If you have trained your taste you know very well — the taste and smell at the same time, these two are very close and must complement each other — you know what kind of food you are cooking, you get the smell of the thing you are cooking and then, because of the smell and the nature of the thing you will know exactly what more you can put in to complete the taste, what you must add of this thing or that, all kinds of ingredients, you see, to combine things; combine the different vegetables, for instance, or the different tastes of things, in such a way that they make a homogeneous whole. And then you will have a dish without needing to taste it every three minutes to find out if you have put enough salt or pepper, enough butter or... You will know exactly what should be done and will do it without a mistake.

It is the same thing for smell. If you have trained your sense of smell, for instance, you can mix things in exact proportions, know the nature... the nature of a perfume, for example, know
with which other perfume... Take flowers; you smell them. Well, there are smells which do not harmonise. If you put them together it makes something that grates, that has no... harmony, unity. But if you have cultivated your sense of smell, when you get one particular odour you know exactly what kind of smells can go harmoniously with it. And you will be able to bring close things made to go together.

With colours it is the same thing. The education in colours is tremendous — in both detail and complexity. If you learn how to distinguish all the colours, to know to what family of colours each belongs, what kind of harmony it can bring about — you can know, it is the same thing. You can keep the memory of the colour as you keep the memory of the form. You want to match all your things... for example, you want to match two things: you want to match a cloak with a skirt or a... well, anything at all... or maybe one kind of cloth with another. Usually you are obliged to take one and then go and compare it with the others; and finally, after many trials, if you are not too clumsy, you finish by finding it. But if you have the training in colour, you look at the colour once and go straight to what matches with it, without any hesitation, because you remember exactly the nature of this colour and go to a colour that can harmonise with it.

But you see, in order to educate yourself you can make lots and lots of... almost games, can’t you? You have a whole series of things, take anything you like: bits of cloth, anything at all, bits of ribbons, little bits of paper, many different colours. And then you arrange them to make a scale, and you see in what order they have to be put. By the side of this one, which should go? By the side of this other, which should go? And so on. And you make an uninterrupted scale in such a way that nothing shouts and you can go from one extreme of colour to the other.

There are countless opportunities for doing things like that. One doesn’t use them. But if you look at the problem from the point of view of education, you have constantly an opportunity
Questions and Answers

for educating yourself, constantly. It seems people make terrible mistakes in taste; if you knew, from the point of view of artistic harmony, you simply live in a chaos! Take just the relations of colours — there are many other things, there is the relation of forms which is more complicated still — but the relation of colours: you take a colour and put it beside another; and it happens that these groups of colours don’t go together. Then, if you have no training, sometimes you are not even aware of it. Sometimes you say, “Oh, it is not very pretty.” But you don’t know why, you are not at all conscious of the reason. But when you are trained, when you have trained your eye, first of all you never make a mistake like this, you never bring together two things which don’t go together; and if by chance, on someone else you see things which are not at all made to go together, you don’t have that vague kind of feeling which says, “Oh, it is not pretty, oh, it is not good”, a kind of vague thing... you don’t know why it isn’t pretty, it isn’t pleasant. And it is precisely because one colour belongs to one class and the other to another class of colours, and if you bring together these two different classes without some intermediary colours to harmonise them, they shriek. You can immediately find the remedy because you know where the fault lies.

Well, from the point of view of forms it is the same thing, you know. You arrange a room. You place anything at all anywhere at all and then, when entering, someone who has a sense of harmony feels uneasy. He feels he is entering a chaos. But if you have the sense of colour and form, you must add to it the sense of order and organisation; but still, even without this utilitarian sense of order and organisation, if you have the true sense of form — of forms which can complement and harmonise with one another, and of colours which can complement and harmonise with one another — when you have to arrange a room, even if you have just three pieces of furniture, you will put them in the right place. But most people do not know, it makes no difference to them. They think only of one thing: “Oh, it will be
more convenient to have this here and more convenient to have that there!” And then, sometimes they don’t even think of this, they put things anywhere at all.

But when they enter their room, the place where they have to live for several hours of the day, they enter a confusion and disorder; and if they are not sensitive they do not become aware of it, they do not feel uneasy. However, this does not help to bring about an inner harmony while if one has... You have a room like that; in this room which has certain dimensions, you have to put a given number of articles of furniture, not more, not less; and you must arrange them in a particular order. For example, there is a harmony of lines, you see; and if you place things without considering this harmony of lines, immediately you get the impression of something jarring. But if you know where a curve is required, where an angle, where something small is needed and where something large, and you put things in order... Take just four articles of furniture: you can put them in the right place or the wrong one; and it happens that if you truly have good taste and are well trained, your organisation is not only harmonious but the most practical. Some people, you know, pile up a considerable number of things in one small place and put them so clumsily that they can’t even move without knocking against something.

I know people of this kind. They enter their room and spend their time bumping against this and that; and so they have to go round about and make all kinds of extraordinary movements in order to be able to use the things they need. And they don’t give it a thought, they don’t give it a thought, it happened like that.... Most people are so unconscious that when they are asked, “Why is it like that?” — “It happened like that, it is like that.” It happened like that, you see, by chance! And they live all their life “by chance”, things happen like that.... Well, this is indeed a lack of the education of the senses. If you really train them in the true way, first of all you escape immediately from this unbearable thing: “It is pleasant, it is unpleasant, this pleases, that
displeases.... Oh, what an unpleasant sensation!” One doesn’t know why, besides, it is just this. And then, suddenly, “Ah, how pleasant it is!”

And then again, you eat too much of something because you find it good, and you make yourself ill. Or again you can’t take a remedy because it is not pleasant and so... you don’t even have a remedy — I mean something that does you good! Many times I have to tell people, “But why don’t you take this?” — “Oh, it is so bad!” But if it does good, it should not seem bad to you. If you are conscious, you ought to feel the good it does and that prevents you from finding it bad.

It is the ignorance of the senses which betrays you to this feeling. You see, you can begin the training when quite small, quite small, and you can continue for more than a hundred years. And then, truly, within yourself to begin with, you never grow old because it is always interesting and always you make progress; and finally, after some time, not very long, something like about twenty years — that’s not much — you succeed in using your senses in a logical, rational, useful way and this helps you to enter into contact with the world consciously. Otherwise you go like half-blind people groping in the darkness there, like this (gesture), trying to find your way and at every step bumping into something. Or maybe, you mistake the road and then you must begin again. You make a mistake, you must correct it. And I tell you, it is like a small exercise you can do, which can be done during any... “Why is it like that? Why have you done that?” — “I don’t know.” — “Why have you arranged this in this way?” — “I don’t know.” If you are honest to yourself, you will be obliged to say to yourself a hundred times a day, “I don’t know.”

I don’t think there’s one in a hundred who does things consciously and deliberately and who is in tune with an inner principle of taste or sense of harmony. There are people like that, but not many, not very many. And even those who have an innate taste (there are people with an innate taste, whose senses
are refined from birth — they should show some gratefulness to their parents always, for it is something very rare and they must have been born under a lucky star), even these can reach through education an extraordinary perfection. To develop the faculty of observation, nowadays they do — it is in fashion — they do exercises. I think... I don’t know, perhaps you are made to do them also, all kinds of exercises of all types; as for example, putting a certain number of objects on a table, like that. And then the students are called in — certain objects are put in certain places: they come in, stay for a few seconds and go out again. And then they are asked what was on the table. Now it is interesting to see who has observed. They know, of course, that they have to see something; they are informed beforehand, not even taken by surprise. They are informed, they are told, “You are to look.”

And so, those who can tell exactly how many objects there were and where they were, these are first-class ones. But you can do it for yourself as an exercise, it is very interesting. You go somewhere... you go to a friend’s and then come out after a while and ask yourself, “Where was the furniture? How was it arranged? What were the objects on the table?” You will see whether you can remember and have observed clearly or not. What was the colour of the curtains? What was the colour of the cushions? All kinds of things; it is a boundless field of experience.

*When one of the organs fails?*

Well, you must train it.

*I mean when it is not very good.*

Well, you develop it, you *can* develop it. Everything can be developed, methodically. This is again something else, this kind of submission to fate. “Oh, my eyes are bad! Oh, my nose does not work! Oh, my ears are of no use!” And what’s more, one spends his time repeating, “My eyes are bad”, so this becomes
worse and worse. Unless there is, you see — yes, of course, there can be people who from their birth have no eyes at all. But then that is hopeless, one cannot mend them. But those who have just... most people have one organ which is bad because they did not know how to use it, because from their very childhood they have not made good use of it; and in every case one can improve it so much — by education — so much that it becomes quite sufficient.

Of course you will tell me there are people who don’t have legs and others who don’t have fingers or who... This may happen; but to these I won’t say, “Use your legs or your fingers!” I am not so unreasonable. But I think that if children are taken very young, there are very few who cannot be set right so much so that they become normal — if not exceptional at least normal. Naturally, there can be accidents, that is something else. But even with an accident one can lessen its importance and its consequences through an appropriate education at the proper time. You see, it is exactly the same thing as the woodland or virgin forest and the cultivated garden. Obviously, the woodland or virgin forest can have its beauty but in any case it is a chaos: it is the beauty of chaos. On the other hand, say you have a cultivated garden: you can in a given space have all kinds of flowers, for example, and produce the maximum number of things. Well, a human body is like that. If it grows up like that, as it wants, it is a woodland or a virgin forest, a jungle. But if you take it very young and take great care of it, well, it can become a very beautiful garden; and yet the elements are the same. You are not asked to change the nature of the ground, you are told to cultivate it, instead of letting it go its own way in disorder.

Some people, of course, will tell you, “Oh, the woodland is beautiful, it is more beautiful than a garden!” It depends on how one sees things; but then we shall not speak about education any longer, it is not worthwhile. We shall no longer speak of self-mastery, it is not worthwhile. We won’t speak of discipline any more, we won’t speak of yoga any more, we shall leave Nature
Sweet Mother, many people tell us to ask questions in the class. Mother, if the questions are not ours, what should we do?

Well, you can ask one... If I find it interesting I shall reply, if not we shall leave it. What is it? Give me a sample.

Not today, Sweet Mother.

(Another child) Very often this happens.

(Another child) In North India a child was brought up by a wolf.

What, what?

Brought up by a wolf.

Ah, yes. I saw the photographs, yes.

How did it happen?

How did it happen? But I don’t know about it. I know nothing about this adventure. I saw a photograph, that’s all; and I did not
Questions and Answers

find it at all interesting and thought a lot of noise was being made about something quite uninteresting. The child was hideous. A little monstrosity. That's all.

The psychic being which incarnated in it before its birth wanted to have some experience, didn't it? But this accident from its birth... what will happen?

Perhaps it wanted this accident, what do you know about it? It could have just this desire to have an experience of this kind. I don’t know. I saw the photograph... there didn’t seem to be much of a psychic being there! (Laughter) It was rather a rudimentary something, a possibility which will be realised after centuries and centuries. Still, even if it was a conscious psychic being which wanted an experience, perhaps it wanted this one, perhaps it asked itself: “What kind of sensations does one have if nursed by a wolf instead of a woman?” This should not be very thrilling; still perhaps it was someone who had been struck by the history of the foundation of Rome and wanted to see how it felt, if it was true; but in any case it did not succeed. Kipling’s story is finer than this real history. The little child there was nursed by a wolf... his name was... Mowgli, wasn’t it? But at least he was good, he was nice; while this child is a horror. It is something... it is not interesting. Are these the kind of questions people ask you? This type?

Not always.

Something better than this?

Yes.

But you don’t have these for today? No? Then we shall stop. Au revoir.